ON THE COVER: The Church of Allhallows in Derby. From *A Book of Architecture* by James Gibbs (London, 1739), in The Chapin Library at Williams College. Gibbs explained the design for his contemporary addition to the old church in an accompanying note:

> *The Church of Allhallows in Derby is a very large fabrick, joined to a fine gothick steeple. It is the more beautiful for having no galleries, which, as well as pews, clog up and spoil the inside of churches, and take away from that right proportion which they otherwise would have, and are only justifiable as they are necessary. The plainness of this building makes it less expensive, and renders it more suitable to the old steeple.*

ON THE TITLE PAGE: "Mt. Greylock from Mt. Hope Farm," photograph by William Tague.

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Modernization and Its Discontents

Each year since 1978, some sixty faculty members from Amherst College, Wesleyan University, and Williams College have gathered at one of the campuses for a colloquium focused on an issue of common interest and concern. The *Berkshire Review* prints the essays presented at these annual meetings.

"Modernization and Its Discontents" was the topic chosen for discussion at the 1981 colloquium, held at Williams College on January 15-17. Marshall Berman of the City College of New York was invited to deliver the opening address.

normal sense of time and has created an epidemic of disordered memory. Perhaps, then, it is the commitment to preserving a humane and national language which best serves, in Professor Peterson's words, "to overshadow the avant-garde romance of Bolshevik collectivization." Russian fiction is often at its best when it talks about fiction itself. I sometimes think, or like to think, that when village prose speaks of Russia's pride in its cultural heritage, we may really have a case of literature defending literature and, in a broader sense, all forms of free and individual expression. There can be no better way to emphasize the role which language plays in creating the sense of Russian communalism and greatness — a sense which transcends all political and temporal allegiances and which constitutes that "second government" of which Solzhenitsyn speaks — than by recalling the words of Ivan Turgenev, written almost one hundred years ago:

> In these days of doubt, in these days of painful brooding over the fate of my country, you alone are my rod and my staff, O great, mighty, true, and free Russian language! If it were not for you, how could one keep from despairing at the sight of what is going on at home? And it is inconceivable that such a language should not belong to a great people.[8]

Notes

[1] *The First Circle,* trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p. 358.
[2] *Letters of Anton Chekhov,* trans. Michael Henry Heim and Simon Karlinsky (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 26.
[3] For a further discussion of this theme, see the excellent article by Victor Terras, "Mayakovsky and Time," (*Slavic and East European Journal,* XIII, 2, 1969), pp. 151–163, to which I am here indebted.
[4] *Hope Abandoned* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), p. 483.
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 555.
[6] *Ibid.,* p. 60.
[7] For a remarkably frank discussion of this theme, and one of the earliest examples of village prose, see Alexander Yashin's story "Rychagi," (in *Moskva-literaturnyi al'manax,* Moscow, 1956, pp. 502–513).
[8] *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1967), XIII, p. 198.

Where Did Mass Culture Come From? The Case of Magazines

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To my knowledge, it was Daniel Lerner who most formally brought mass culture into the scope of modernization theory. In *The Passing of Traditional Society* he outlined a model that presented developing societies as systems, in which four processes work together: more people move to cities; more people learn how to read and write; more people buy newspapers, listen to radios, and so forth; and more people vote. Furthermore the system evolves in that order: urbanization, literacy, "media participation," and "electoral participation" — to give these processes the names Lerner used. Lerner set out to formulate "correlational hypotheses which can be tested," in order to avoid "the genetic problem of causality."[1] Yet regular stages do hint as causality, and Lerner accepted the hint. Urbanization, he said, was the "key variable" in the system, for "it is with urbanization that the modernizing process historically has begun in Western societies" (p. 58). And his language gravitated toward the causal: urbanization "stimulates the needs" for participation in society: "Only cities require a largely literate population"; they also "create the demand for impersonal communication" (p. 61) — *i.e.,* for media; in turn, "a communication system is both index and agent of change" (p. 56); and so on through the steps toward political participation.

Of course neither a communication system nor cities nor the process of urbanization can literally be an agent, so Lerner needed a premise about the human agents behind these abstractions, and why they act as they do. That premise, implicit throughout his exposition, was clearly stated at the end: "the great dramas of societal transition occur through individuals involved in solving their personal problems and living their private lives" (pp. 74–75). Thus urbanization is a "movement by individuals, each having made a personal choice to seek elsewhere his own version of a better life" (pp. 47–48). A plain truth. Yet one need only recall Midland farm laborers deprived of subsistence by enclosure, Lancashire hand-loom weavers starved out in competition with power-loom owners in the 1820s and 1830s, or Irish peasants driven by repression and famine to Liverpool and New York, to want to add Marx's qualification: "not under circumstances they themselves have chosen." Likewise, it is a bit misleading, not to say callous, to think of a peasant robbed blind by his landlord and

squatting in a shack town on the edge of Adana or Ankara, in Lerner's much-admired Turkey, as "having made a personal choice to seek elsewhere his own version of a better life."

But I wish to challenge the theory at another point — its account of mass culture, an area where it is more plausible to think of millions of people making real choices. People do choose to buy a newspaper or a magazine or a radio, and not sheerly out of desperation. "Media participation" is mainly voluntary (you can even stay away from Muzak if you are dedicated to the project), and it is chosen in pursuit of a better life, or at least a better Tuesday evening. What I think to be unhelpfully vague in modernization theory's account of mass culture is its undifferentiated treatment of the people and the choices that are at work. Thus Lerner writes: "when most people in a society have become literate, they tend to generate all sorts of new desires and to develop the means of satisfying them." They do so, he says, through media participation, which in turn "tends to raise participation in all sectors of the social system" — for example, in the economy, in the "public forum," in politics. The generating force here is, simply, "people" and their desires "to which participant institutions have responded" (p. 62). In other words, people get what they want; suppliers merely meet their demand.

Modernization theory may be defunct, but this combination of free market theory and functionalism has persisted as a main strand in the debate over mass culture.[2] I believe it defective because it says virtually nothing about the desires and choices of those who *produce* mass culture, or about the way "supply" and "demand" actually work. In effect, it puts CBS and a viewer tuning in "Archie Bunker's Place" on an equal footing.

Needless to say, the main competing theory of social change, Marxism, assigns very different roles to CBS and to that viewer. Taking off from Marx and Engels' suggestion that those who own the means of material production control the means of mental production as well, and so make their ideas the ruling ideas of the age, this theory has yielded much valuable work, often under titles that dramatize its polemical force: *e.g.*, Herbert I. Schiller's *The Mind Managers*[3] and Hans Magnus Enzensberger's *The Consciousness Industry*.[4] As Enzensberger captiously puts it, "The mind industry's main business and concern is not to sell its product: it is to 'sell' the existing order . . ." (p. 10). Although this theory is much more helpful than the other, I believe it is defective because it underestimates the practical task of selling mass cultural products (if CBS does not sell its product it is out of business, and thus unable to shape anyone's consciousness), and because, unlike Lerner's theory, it gives too little place to the

choices and needs of the people who buy mass cultural experiences. They tend to become poor suckers who passively take subliminal commands from their rulers and believe what they are told. Lerner's theory is naive, but any adequate theory will have to account for the individual choices he emphasizes (although it must not, as he does, make them the sole driving force of history).

Against this background of ideas ("theories" is really too grand a word for them) I want to consider the way mass culture actually came into being in the United States. I have two purposes in doing so. First, to drive another nail into the coffin of modernization theory: I think many people hold that it collapsed because poor societies in the twentieth century could not, in their dependence on rich, industrialized societies, follow the same path that those societies had cut in the nineteenth. This may be true, but I hold that modernization theory also fails to explain what happened to begin with in Britain, the U.S., and elsewhere. Second: going back to origins is a much more direct route to an outlook on cause than a "latitudinal" study like Lerner's. By looking back we can see what needs led some people to produce mass culture and others to consume it. We can see that it appeared as the result of human strategies for getting on and not as conflict-free strategies that all adopted in concert. And we may also see *why* this kind of society adopted mass culture (in the only sense of *why* that makes sense to me — one that refers us to the social process in which human beings create lives, institutions, a society).

When did mass culture arise in the United States? Not all at once, of course, any more than the industrial revolution began on the day Watt got his steam engine to work. Historians of cultural forms are fond of pushing back to firsts. One traces printed advertising in English back to a 1480 poster by Caxton, offering to sell rules for the guidance of clergy at Easter.[5] The first book in the Colonies was published in Cambridge in 1640, the first newspaper in 1690, the first magazine in 1741. But for nearly 100 years after the last of these dates there was nothing in the Colonies or the new Republic that even distantly resembled modern mass culture. There were beginnings in the decades before the Civil War. In the 1820s, a crowd of over fifty thousand watched the horse race between Eclipse and Sir Henry on Long Island, and an equally large one saw a regatta in New York Harbor. Most literate households had a Bible. Tens of thousands visited Barnum's American Museum after it opened in 1842. A vigorous penny press developed in New York after 1835. There was a paperback revolution of sorts in book publishing in the 1840s. But despite these and other events, I contend that a national mass culture was not firmly established in this country until the 1880s and 1890s.

I cannot fully develop that argument here, for lack of space. But the point is important, because I am talking about historical explanation, and social forces at work in 1830 will no more account for what happened in 1890 than vice versa. At both times people were meeting particular historical challenges. So I shall enumerate quickly some reasons for fixing upon the latter date.

First, sporting events were not regularized and repeated daily or weekly for large paying audiences until a decade or so after the National Baseball League was founded in 1876.

Second, newspapers were big but mainly local phenomena before the Civil War. Only after that time did the Associated Press spread nationally reprinted dispatches (aided of course by the telegraph); syndication of features became common in the 1880s; the comics arrived in the 1890s. That was the first moment when Americans had available a homogeneous national experience of "the" news, of opinion, of household helps, and of entertainment through newspapers. It was also the time when newspapers began to get more than half their revenue from ads, and when ads for national brands took a prominent place alongside classifieds and ads for local merchants.

Third, a handful of books did spread through the national consciousness before the Civil War. In addition to the Bible, Webster's speller must have been almost everywhere, since 30,000,000 copies of it were sold by 1860. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* became a prototype for the modern best seller, when it almost immediately sold 300,000 hardbound copies in 1852, and then 3,000,000 of various editions in the next eight years. But these were isolated publishing phenomena; they did not build a stable mass readership for a dependable succession of "hits." The explosion of paperbacks (really novels printed in newspaper format) in the 1840s was a move in that direction: printers drove the price of a novel down from half a dollar to a quarter, then to twelve and one-half cents, and finally to six cents.[6] A series of bankruptcies ended the scramble, but a precedent was set for the dime novels of the sixties and seventies and the cheap libraries of the seventies and eighties. But these remained essentially wildcat operations, with piracy and price-cutting as their strategies, and without habituated audiences. Only in the eighties and nineties did book publishing become a business with regular methods of hype, with many dependable outlets across the nation, and with a conscious program for replicating big sellers like *Trilby* and *Ben Hur*. The establishment of a best seller list in 1895 can serve as an indication that the book industry took something like its modern form at about the same time as newspaper publishing and the business of sports.

The same was true for magazine publishing. I choose magazines for my case history because their transformation was dramatic, and obvious to all. A typical magazine of the 1830s, to take a starting point, claimed a circulation measured in hundreds for a few pages of solid columns of print, with few or no ads. These magazines rarely made a profit, usually died young, and reached audiences that were regional at most. There were no national magazines before 1850. Even after the railroad linked the two coasts in 1869 and even (for a while) after the Postal Act of 1879 made cheap distribution possible, magazines were not a main feature of American culture, and they barely resembled mass magazines of today. Yet shortly after 1900 they very much did, and the total circulation of monthlies alone was 64,000,000. How did this happen?

Magazine historians generally focus on the "magazine revolution" of 1893. And although I think it bears a different kind of scrutiny than they have given it, it was indeed a kind of revolution. The leading respectable monthlies — *Harper's, Century, Atlantic,* and a few others — sold for 25 or 35 cents, and had circulations of no more than 200,000. In the middle of the panic of 1893, S. S. McClure brought out his magazine at an unprecedented fifteen cents. John Brisben Walker, editor of the old *Cosmopolitan,* quickly dropped his price to twelve and a half cents. And in October, with much hoopla, Frank Munsey cut the price of his faltering monthly from a quarter to a dime. Its circulation went from 40,000 that month to 200,000 the following February, then to 500,000 in April, and finally by 1898 to the largest circulation in the world (so Munsey claimed, anyhow).[7] These entrepreneurs — Munsey most consciously — had hit upon an elegantly simple formula: identify a large audience that is not affluent or particularly classy, but that is getting on well enough, and that has cultural aspirations; give it what it wants to read; build a huge circulation; sell a lot of advertising space at rates based on that circulation (Munsey's rate was one dollar per page per thousand of circulation); sell the magazine at a price *below* the cost of production, and make your profit on ads.

But if this is the principle behind the mass magazines of our century — and it is — the historians' decision to fix 1893 as the critical moment is only a narrative convenience. Not only had at least one of the elite monthlies (the *Century*) built up a large advertising business during the 1880s, but other magazines had also built mass audiences during that decade. One such group was the women's magazines. Even before Munsey's "revolution," but after improvements had been made on the formulas of earlier magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's,* the *Delineator* was selling half a million copies and the *Ladies' Home Journal* 600,000; the *Journal,* furthermore, cost only

five cents through the eighties and ten cents when Munsey made his move. The historians' emphasis on 1893 seems to discount magazines for women (Munsey himself, for some reason, never regarded the *Journal* as a magazine). It also dismisses another group of pioneers, with what amounts to cultural snobbery if not class contempt: magazines called *The Youth's Companion*, the *People's Literary Companion*, and *Comfort* all had circulations of more than half a million at some time before 1893. These printed fiction and features, but were given over (primarily) to ads: in effect, they were mail order catalogs dressed up as magazines to meet postal regulations, and were often sent free to "subscribers" with little or no actual effort to gather in renewals.

In short, in the 1880s editors and publishers first succeeded in basing their business on low prices, large circulations, and advertising revenues. And the great editors of the 1890s, who turned this principle into even greater profits, understood it well. Edward Bok of the *Journal* served his apprenticeship under Frank Doubleday in the advertising department of Scribner's in 1884, and was head of advertising for two Scribner's periodicals at the time when he was sensing the untapped market for a national women's magazine. Frank Munsey had drawn the right conclusion from his earlier troubles with a youth magazine: he had built up a large circulation among young people for the *Golden Argosy*, but later saw that his audience was of little value to advertisers, since it had little money to spend. Both Bok and Munsey were quite consciously looking for a mass readership not served by magazines, but attractive to advertisers.

What actually happened in 1893, then, was an extension of a revolution already underway. Munsey, McClure, and Walker fused two business practices that were already working well, but separately. They took from the women's magazines and the cheap weeklies the idea of delivering a large group of consumers to advertisers, and from the leading monthlies they took the idea of appealing to people who wanted, as Lerner puts it, to "participate" in the new national society that was evolving. How they accomplished this second thing, I shall briefly relate at the end of this essay. For now, suffice it to say that their magazines gave a very large group of readers the sense of participation in a mainstream of culture rather than in an elite tributary identified with family, old money, universities, the past.

So magazines rather suddenly took on a central role in national life. I have mentioned only a few of the leaders, but the phenomenon was quite widespread. At the end of the Civil War the total circulation of monthlies seems to have been, at most, 4,000,000. It was about 18,000,000 in 1890, and 64,000,000 in 1905.[8] To bring those figures down to scale a bit, in 1865 there may have been one copy of a

monthly magazine for every ten people in the country. By 1905 there were three for every four people, or about four to every household. And for a contrast, while monthly magazine circulation was more than tripling between 1890 and 1905, the total circulation of newspapers and weekly magazines rose only from 36,000,000 to 57,000,000 — less than that of all monthlies.[9] By this measure, monthly magazines had become the major form of repeated cultural experience for the people of the United States.

But not for *all* of its people. Who were magazine readers? I would like to know of some careful research on that. Without such research, we are left with conjecture based on content, and (perhaps better) on what readership the editors were trying to reach, and what readership they thought they had succeeded in reaching. McClure, for instance, derived his idea of what "people" wanted by peddling kitchenware and trinkets through Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio during his summer vacations from Knox College, about 1880. He wrote: "My experience had taught me that the people in the little towns . . . were just like the people in New York or Boston. . . . I felt myself to be a fairly representative Middle-Westerner. I . . . printed what interested me, and it usually seemed to interest the other Middle-Westerners."[10] These were people who had cash to buy coffee pots, clothes, and knick-knacks, who owned homes, who had what McClure called "business affairs" (farms, shops, trades) and who were eager for more contact with the wider society. (Note that McClure regarded them as much like their Eastern counterparts: "people" were the same everywhere.)

Cyrus Curtis, the most adroit businessman of them all, intentionally shaped the *Ladies' Home Journal* as a "high class magazine" for people aspiring to respectability. He and Bok did carry out some rudimentary market research in the early days, studying some neighborhoods where the *Journal* was read; and Curtis claimed in 1893 that "the majority of *Journal* readers lived in the suburbs of large cities . . . and that his small-town readers belonged to the professional ranks in their communities."[11] Since he was advancing this claim in order to attract toney advertisers, I suspect that he overstated it. But I would also guess that he was right in thinking his readers *wanted* to be professionals and suburbanites, and shaped their working and domestic lives with that in mind. In short, the main audience for these magazines was what was called then, as now, the "middle class": people in small businesses, professionals, clerks, tradespeople, farmers, and significantly, wives and mothers from this same stratum.

To put the point negatively, the readership was not "people," not the entire population (magazines were not a universal medium like

television). It was not the 20% who were immigrants or children of immigrants; not the 12% who were black; not the poorest Anglo-Saxon farmers and workers; but probably a full half of the white "native" stock and something like a third of all the people. It is worth emphasizing this point, both to counter the vagueness of modernization theory and to oppose an implication carried by the categorical term "general magazines" in use among historians that some magazine audiences had no social definition. They may not have grouped together as cycling fans or young boys or farmers, but *Atlantic* spoke to an audience grouped by class perspective, and *Munsey's* addressed another one. Then as now, magazine audiences were segmented, organized around particular interests or strategies for living in society. And the segments were organized by interest (in both senses of the word) *for the purpose* of selling their attention to advertisers.

As I turn to the question of why magazines became a form of mass culture when they did, I want to keep the idea of purpose clearly in mind. Purpose has no place in the classic formula of Harold Lasswell upon which almost all bourgeois communications research has built; that formula includes who says what, how, to whom, and with what effect, but not *with what intent.* And, in Lerner's model, purpose appears only as a need expressed by participants and suppliers in the neutral market place. I will try to be a good deal more specific than that, if still too vague for my own satisfaction.

Why magazines? Why then? First, it may be wise quickly to dismiss one frequent answer: technology. Indisputably, the rise of mass magazines could not have happened without certain mechanical and chemical innovations, notably the rotary press, stereotype plates, and photoengraving. But the rotary press had been around since 1847, and the other two since the 1860s. As with most media techniques, all were developed gradually, and *in response* to commercial needs, not in advance or independently of them. (New rotary presses of record capacity, for instance, were built to order for *Century* in 1886 and *Munsey's* in 1898).[12] All the necessary technology depended on simple and well-known principles, and was applied as capital would have it.

If technology must be cited, we had better note a much broader set of developments after the Civil War: electric lights and motors, trolleys, the telephone, and a six-fold expansion of railroads by 1890. Most crucial, I think, was a huge increase in manufacturing generally. The total value of manufactured things passed that of farm products in 1850, and doubled every ten or fifteen years through the 1890s.

Consider this transformation still more abstractly: in the 1880s and 1890s, capital expanded faster than at any other period in our history; in fact, capital formation climaxed precisely in the years 1889–93. But I do not wish to make too much of that conjuncture. The point is that the progress of competitive capitalism reached a crescendo during the period just before and during the growth of the new magazines. I must be ludicrously brief about what this entailed, but then the facts and events are well known.

As capitalists raced ahead without external check, making fortunes and transforming the society, they were experiencing rather painfully the *internal* contradictions of the new system:

(1) For the system as a whole, there were crises of overproduction, boom and bust. Between 1873 and 1897, there were fourteen years of recession or depression.

(2) For individual firms, there was great instability. The free market was an intolerably dangerous environment, and remained so in spite of ingenious efforts to make it less free: bribery, rebates, pools, trusts, outright monopoly. Nothing worked well for long.

(3) Profitability fell off. Marx's theory of the declining rate of profit may not apply to later phases of capitalism, but it worked as he predicted in the competitive capitalism of the American nineteenth century. The worst period was 1889 to 1898.

(4) Attempts to cope by reducing wages and taking more control over the labor process led to all but open class war. Indeed, it became quite open at intervals throughout this period: 1877, the "Great Upheaval"; 1886, Haymarket; 1892, Homestead, the Idaho mine wars, the New Orleans streetcar strike; 1894, 750,000 workers on strike at one time or another.

By concentrating their energies on production and on price competition, businessmen had supervised the building of a tremendous productive system, but a system whose advance they could not well control, either as a class or as individuals; and it was a system whose chaos led simultaneously to killing risk, diminishing profits, and social rebellion. The challenge for them was to create an environment in which they could carry on the process of accumulation with less uncertainty and resistance. Their attempt to do so through monopoly was never more than a temporary success, even before the Federal Government began its half-hearted and feeble interventions. Other corporate strategies which later proved effective, such as tacit agreement not to compete through prices, getting the government to regulate competition, or enlisting the cooperation of unions to administer industrial peace, were for one reason or another not yet available.

In this fix, capitalists began to hit on the idea of controlling not output or prices, but *sales.* I do not suggest a conscious, class-wide

blueprint for the future. Individual capitalists made specific business decisions to solve immediate problems, and the sum of those decisions was to emphasize marketing rather than production. Looking around, businessmen of the postwar period would have had no trouble noticing that, year by year, a lot more people had a lot more money. Looking back, we can put what they sensed into numbers. For instance, the number of white collar workers increased six-fold from 1870 to 1900 (and at that time the distinction between white and blue still translated into cash, not just gentility). Per capita income, adjusted to stable dollars, nearly doubled from 1880 to 1900. And because of the rapid growth in numbers of workers, the total amount of "discretionary" income available grew even faster. We can gather an idea of the magnitudes involved by noting that even though industrial workers lagged behind others, the total wage paid to them quintupled, from $380 million to $1.9 billion, between 1860 and 1890.[13] Not only was there vastly more cash circulating; but in addition, a larger and larger portion of the people were dependent on purchases in the market to satisfy needs once met through home production. So there were many new purchasing dollars to be claimed, and also a broad area of life for businessmen to colonize and shape.

They responded to the opportunity — and to the crisis — with supple ingenuity, developing a variety of practices and institutions that are commonplace now, but were unprecedented then. One group of businessmen specialized in marketing on a large scale, and created systems through which producers had to work: department stores (Wanamaker's and a few others were large operations before the end of the 1870s); chain stores (A&P and Woolworth's, for instance, were firmly established by 1890); and, about the same time, mail order firms (Sears and Montgomery Ward). While merchants were assembling and presenting these arrays of commodities, the railroads and the postal system allowed distribution of them to people all over the country.

Markets became national. In an effort to establish their products among many others in those markets, businessmen hit on some practices that take us back toward the origin of mass circulation magazines. Notably, they developed uniform packaging, to replace bulk sales of anonymous crackers or cereal or soap. They gave their products brand names to help buyers form habits of loyalty, and trademarks to link a second sign to the product and so enhance its symbolic aura. They further mythicized consumption by connecting slogans and jingles and cartoon characters to commodities. In short, they came to depend upon advertising.

As with newspapers and magazines, it is important to see that modern brand advertising has little in common with forerunners like Roman signs or seventeenth-century handbills, or even the prolific ads of the early nineteenth century. Those ads promoted a particular service, like the stage coach from New York to Philadelphia; or a unique opportunity to buy, as when a Main Street merchant had received a new shipment of clothes from England; or an exchange not far removed from barter as when Mr. Robinson was prepared to sell or trade his bay mare. Those early ads were local and tied to the instant, not to a commodity that one could buy in identical form in Baltimore or St. Louis, next week or next year. And their format was austere (a few discursive lines of small type) even if their claims were often flamboyant.

It is clear that national brand advertising could not develop without transport and media, but those were not its causes. Its causes were the needs of capitalist production:

(1) With high fixed costs and a low marginal cost, it made sense to keep the machines running, and therefore to strain for higher sales.
(2) Production for exchange was production apart from a known use of the thing made, and apart from a guaranteed purchase; thus it made urgent sense to reach out and influence anonymous buyers in the aggregate.
(3) Markets were an impersonal medium of human relationship. Manufacturers had to overcome buyers' uneasiness at dealing with complete strangers.

At early stages, human intermediaries helped solve these merchandising problems: the local shopkeeper who would vouch for the product; the peddler who at least returned each year; the drummers for particular lines who overspread the country a hundred years ago. People originally experienced impersonal markets as a kind of con game, and the huckstering during the early phase of product advertising (patent medicines, sex aids, books that would renew your life) did little to change that image. Only gradually did advertisers learn to seek and obtain confidence in particular goods and in the whole commodity-based way of life.

That did not happen until advertising arose as a separate business, with specialized techniques and knowledge. The first agency was founded in 1841, but again, "firsts" are always misleading. The early agents were no more than space brokers for manufacturers or merchants who wrote their own copy. That copy was plain, even when deceitful, and virtually unadorned with pictures. Only after the Civil War did some agents take on the writing of copy. Only then did they

create visual displays (first engravings and paintings, then photographs) to which, by the 1890s, color had been added. Gradually they learned to reduce the ratio of prose to picture, of information to aura, creating the iconic links that most strikingly characterize advertising today.

Most importantly, not until the eighties and nineties did they light on the idea of a nationwide advertising *campaign* to launch a new product or to claim a leading share of national sales for an old one: Ivory Soap, the Royal typewriter, the Waltham watch, Heinz 57 varieties. It was at that moment, too, that they tried out what are known as "primary appeals," pushing not just a brand, but the idea of bringing into one's daily routines a whole new genre of commodity, the idea of changing one's life: bicycles, canned goods, sewing machines, gum, eventually automobiles, Nabisco crackers, Kodak cameras, Coca Cola. If it did not create new needs, such advertising certainly did channel present needs into new habits and dependencies. More broadly still, advertising became a strategy for creating a new social order beyond the workplace, and for shaping people's social identities in leisure time, as consumers. Advertisers strove to organize home life around commodities and turn the home itself into a sanctuary away from work, a place where what was remembered as human caring and closeness could survive, mediated by products.

One can abstract this complex historical process into figures. Advertising expenditures were 22 cents per capita in 1865, but $1.13 in 1890.[14] This was the only period until after World War I when advertising revenue grew rapidly as a portion of the gross national product. And if it were possible to sort out brand advertising from merchant advertising, the shift would appear even more striking. In just three decades advertising had metamorphosed from a small and primitive activity into a skilled practice central to economic and cultural life.

Magazines played a central role in this change from the start. By the 1870s J. Walter Thompson had seen them as a likely vehicle for national brand campaigns. By the 1890s, all the major agencies had entered the magazine field. In this they showed a fine harmony of purpose with new magazine entrepreneurs like Curtis and Munsey who had no genteel scruples to prevent them from seeing themselves as in the advertising business. From the perspective I have adopted, then, it is hardly too much to say that modern magazines were an outgrowth of advertising which, in turn, was a strategy of big capitalists to deal with the historical conditions in which they found themselves.

Of course this is one perspective only. I have adopted it to underscore my point that mass culture first arose as an adjunct to the circulation of commodities and as a partial solution to problems encountered by early capitalists. In itself, though, this way of looking at things is undialectical. Like manipulation theory, it credits or blames the bourgeoisie for everything, the workers for nothing. I need to restore wholeness to the picture — though all too sketchily — by bringing Lerner's "people" back into it — not, however, just as individuals who moved to cities in pursuit of a better life and there expressed a need to participate in media.

By the 1890s a substantial majority of adult men were selling their labor power to somebody else for wages. This much-studied transition from an earlier system of work meant a great loss of autonomy for workers. Clock in, clock out, follow the pace of the machine, give over to your boss the tasks of conceiving and planning. With this degrading of work came a loss of authority at home. As major kinds of production moved from farm and village to factory, the economic basis for the old patriarchal family was eroded. And as the man gave up autonomy and authority, so did the woman, in that the new system devalued the kind of work she did, since it was outside the money economy and thus outside the main calculus of value. Finally, because the family no longer produced what it used, its members had to go out into the market to satisfy their basic needs. The new system brought many comforts, too; I don't want to label it "bad" according to some ahistorical ethic, but only to insist that it confronted wage-earners with a drastic change in the terms of their existence.

Advertising helped people negotiate this way of life. It helped them feel at home with commodities and their uses. It helped them trust the distant strangers who made commodities. It showed them a way to use commodities as a sign of competence and status, evidence that one knew the sophisticated and respectable way to do things. For women, consumption was at the center of their new role. They could show new skills as purchasers and users of commodities; they could show care for their families with products; they could give the home social standing by placing the right things in it. They could make it a secure and loving place where those who went out to work returned to a sphere of dignity and autonomy, a place where alienated products were brought under psychic control.

If ads helped wage-earners and wives to create such a space, so did the rest of what magazines contained. After all, though subscribers may have welcomed advertising messages and symbols into their homes, they bought one magazine rather than another for its editorial content; and here is where the ingenuity and intuition of the new editors came into play. This is a big subject. I can touch upon it only

in the most cursory way. But it is important at least to note that there were dramatic changes in the content of magazines.

For instance, just before the 1893 "revolution," *Harper's* featured articles and stories such as "Street Scenes of India," "Agricultural Chile," "The Social Side of Yachting," and "The Young Whist Player's Novitiate," whose titles are enough to adumbrate the class appeal of this leading journal. It scanned the whole world from a tourist's perspective. It nurtured the habits and interests of a moneyed readership, along, no doubt, with a readership that *wished* it had money and could run the world. Some of the new monthlies preserved this upper class base; most did not. But during this period all shifted their emphasis toward daily life and contemporary American society. I will mention three such emphases:

First, magazines told people how to live (as magazines do today). The *Ladies' Home Journal* offered readers in 1893 moral guidance and inspiration from wives of famous pastors. It presented memoirs by exemplary men, often writers with cultural and moral authority like Garland and Howells. It gave practical advice to girls and women on proper conduct and on practical tasks like shopping, sending packages, giving parties, trying new recipes, and wearing new fashions. The *Journal* cultivated a very personal relationship with its readers, that of a friend and counselor. (Before Bok discontinued the practice during World War I, the *Journal* staff had individually answered millions of inquiries and appeals.) And it made itself a bulwark of middle class values against the dangerous classes (blacks, immigrants) on one side and decadent classes on the other.

Second, magazines helped readers understand how things work, and that was something one could no longer learn through daily work and community life. *Cosmopolitan* ran a "Progress of Society" section, and explained in detail how men had harnessed Niagara to produce electricity. Magazines helped middle class people feel competent and at home in the world through a *mediated* comprehension of human action upon nature, and of nature itself as represented through science.

Third, magazines told how society works. For "society" — as opposed to "Community" and "hierarchy" — was a new object of apprehension (the word itself did not take on its present meaning until the eighteenth century, nor was there another word to express that way of looking at ourselves). And as soon as society became visible, it grew opaque. Market relations replaced direct personal relations. It was hard to tell why depressions and progress happened. The social process, like production, was invisible, but it could be investigated and reported in words. This emphasis sometimes took the form (as in

Cosmopolitan) of laudatory articles on business and its achievements, sometimes the form (as in *McClure's*) of muckraking. But most or all of the monthlies tried to present their public with a reconstruction of contemporary society and its springs and levers.

In these ways the magazines restored to readers a sense of at-homeness in the distanced and puzzling world that capitalism had made. The extravagant use of photographs, which was one of their main appeals, seems just as related to a recognition of this need as to a fascination with a new gimmick. In sum, the contents of magazines spoke to the deepest sort of socially created needs. Magazines helped ease the passage into industrial society for working people of moderate means just as, on the other side of the class divide, they helped capitalists make that society a less menacing environment for their project of development.

I hope that this account has shown modernization theory, in Lerner's version, to be of little use in explaining how mass culture arose in the United States. Urbanization was not a cause; along with mass culture, it was an effect of the way businessmen took over and reorganized production. Magazines did meet important needs for millions of people, but those needs were themselves historically specific and generated by the new system. To label them needs for "impersonal communication" or for "participation" is to cloud understanding, not sharpen it. Above all, magazines grew up in response to the capitalist manufacturers' powerfulness to shape consumer publics. Supplying a "people's" need for media had no place in the purpose of those capitalists nor in the intent of the advertising entrepreneurs who helped them achieve their ends; its only place was in the purpose of publishers and editors who, creative though they were and prosperous though they became, were small fry whose ingenuity would have come to nothing had they not been in a position to help the big fish control the circulation of commodities and accumulate capital. "Modernization," it seems, is another term for "capitalist development." It is a term that obfuscates.

What about Marxian media theory? A final word, now, about that version of it which explains mass culture as an attempt by the ruling class to control ideology. Magazines did arise from needs of the ruling class, and successful publishers themselves did quickly join the ruling class. But what the capitalists needed was to control and stabilize growth; and what the publishers needed was to sell magazines to the right audiences. The former did not make ideological control an issue, and probably could not have done so. The latter had some ideological goals, but of divergent sorts, and if an editor's ideology did not correspond closely to that of his potential readers, he would

fail anyhow.

Nonetheless, magazines did and do, in my opinion, contribute notably to ideological domination. How? I think the answer is that within the limits of the conditions given, a magazine editor's overriding aim must be the building and holding of large audiences for regularly repeated experiences. Let me say, again with draconian brevity, how I think they have done that:

(1) Magazines have to be predictable (though always "new" at the same time, of course). That necessity drives their representation of life into formulas which simplify, regularize, and smooth out the contradictions of social existence. Predictable formulas also convey to readers the comfortable feeling that things are after all much the same from month to month, year to year: they tend to deny history.

(2) Magazines must help readers to live as they want to, must address their problems. Since magazines are read by individuals and families, they tend to show people how to live *as* individuals and families; but, especially, they show how to improve oneself, how to rise. With this aim, they generally take for granted everything not susceptible to private amendment. The market, property, profit, inequality, the whole base of capitalist society, all these are accepted or ignored — a backdrop for the life of individuals. And this is even more true now than it was in 1900.

(3) Magazines must project a strange mixture of anxiety and optimism. If people have no anxiety they will not need magazines. If magazines offer no hope of solutions, accommodations, improvement of the self or reform of society, they will be too depressing to read. Perhaps I may make further commentary unnecessary by noting that the most successful magazine of all time, the *Reader's Digest,* is one that has beautifully managed that combination.

(4) Magazines must shape a mass public that is valuable to advertisers. Readers with money count for more. Magazines speak to a group's common experience of the world, but common experiences like poverty, age, and unemployment will not support a mass circulation magazine. So magazines express the perspective of people to whom our society has been reasonably kind.

Thus mass magazines are a gatekeeping medium. They admit ideas and feelings into the arena of the discussable. But they work within invisible hegemonic limits, not primarily by the design of the capitalist class but because, to succeed, they must treat their readers precisely *as* masses of consumers.

Notes

[1] Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society; Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p. 56.
[2] See, for instance, Herbert J. Gans, *Popular Culture and Mass Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1974).
[3] Herbert I. Schiller, *The Mind Managers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).
[4] Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Consciousness Industry* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).
[5] Frank Presbrey, *The History and Development of Advertising* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1929), p. 16.
[6] C. Hugh Holman, " 'Cheap Books' and the Public Interest: Paperbound Book Publishing in Two Centuries," in Ray B. Browne, Richard H. Crowder, Virgil L. Lokke, and William T. Stafford, eds., *Frontiers of American Culture* (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1968).
[7] Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1956), ch. 1.
[8] Presbrey, p. 488.
[9] Presbrey, p. 488.
[10] S. S. McClure, *My Autobiography* (London: John Murray, 1914), p. 131.
[11] Salme Harju Steinberg, *Reformer in the Marketplace; Edward W. Bok and The Ladies' Home Journal* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 4.
[12] Peterson, p. 5.
[13] Alex Groner and the Editors of *American Heritage* and *Business Week, The American Heritage History of American Business and Industry* (New York: American Heritage, 1972), p. 174.
[14] Neil H. Borden, *The Economic Effects of Advertising* (Chicago: Richard D. Irwin, 1942), p. 48.

Other works to which I am indebted in less specific ways include:

On magazines: Edward Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (New York: Scribner's, 1921); George Britt, *Forty Years, Forty Millions* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935). (On Munsey.); Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (New York: Appleton, and Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 5 vols., 1930–1968).

On advertising: Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Ralph M. Hower, *The History of an Advertising Agency* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939); Julian L. Simon, *Issues in the Economics of Advertising* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1970); James Playsted Wood, *The Story of Advertising* (New York: Ronald Press, 1958).

I have consulted various economic histories, but have been most influenced by the perspectives of Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, and of Gabriel Kolko. In cultural theory I have taken my lead from Gramsci and, especially, Raymond Williams.

Comments on Ohmann

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The conventional charge to the commentator at academic meetings like these is to link together the several papers that everyone has just heard and to demonstrate that no matter how much they vary in subject or approach, no matter how radically disparate they may seem, be they good, bad, or indifferent, the papers are actually talking about the same thing. Discerning that hidden unity is often a challenge and an amusement; much to the surprise of speakers and audience — not to mention the commentator — there really is a rabbit in the hat. But today's papers defy such facile feats of scholarly prestidigitation. Ostensibly, the two essays address the theme of modernization, but what else do a neo-Marxist analysis of mass culture in turn-of-the-century America and a close reading of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn have to do with each other? I have asked myself that question a good many times. My first instinct was to consult that old standby of American Studies, Alexis de Tocqueville, and to ferret out some prescient prediction that the United States and Russia would emerge as the two great powers of the twentiety-century world. Such a prophecy might serve, in turn, to stimulate reflections on the New Left vision of the 1960s that both the U.S. and the Soviet Union had converged to become inhuman, impersonal, bureaucratic monoliths, serving nobody's interests but those of their elites. Within this framework, one might then consider both popular magazines and Soviet writers as responding, either in complicity or dissent, to the same disastrous course of modern times.

Well, one could do this, but I shall not. I shall instead begin on a far more mundane level, and observe that Professors Peterson and Ohmann have something in common: both are members of Departments of English. The papers they have written testify to the diversity — or perhaps fragmentation — of contemporary approaches to the study of literature and culture. Professor Ohmann's essay is essentially the work of a historian. It presents a broad socioeconomic account of the making of American mass culture, as seen through the history of popular magazines. Professor Ohmann treats culture as a set of concrete, historical institutions that channel and constrain the literary expressions of a time; he tells us a great deal about the various needs the magazines served, but provides little detail about the kinds of stories they actually contained. By contrast, Professor Peterson displays his skills as a literary critic, developing a fascinating reading of Solzhenitsyn's "peasant sketches," setting them in a long Russian literary tradition, and tracing their later influence. Nowhere does he discuss the political and ideological context within which Soviet writers must operate if they wish to be officially published, nor the consequences of that context for the literary strategies Solzhenitsyn adopts; all of that is left in the diffuse but menacing background of the piece. Now, of course, one can not do everything in a brief essay — perhaps, Professor Ohmann will discuss content in more detail and Professor Peterson will address context more fully in the longer works on which they are engaged, but I suspect that the evident differences between the two papers reveal fundamental divergences of approach.

Since my own training is in American social and cultural history, I gladly surrender responsibility for further discussion of Professor Peterson's paper to my colleague, Stanley Rabinowitz. But Professor Ohmann's work belongs within my field, and it raises important questions not only about modernization theory but also about mass culture and the legitimation of an urban, industrial capitalist society in the United States. Professor Ohmann takes on the theorists of modernization at a very strategic point: the notions of communications and culture set forth by social scientists such as Daniel Lerner. Modernization theory's emphasis upon popular participation in mass communications as a hallmark of modernity is surely no accident. If we agree that at the heart of the idea of modernization lies a new sense of individual autonomy and effectiveness, a feeling that the individual may rationally control his own life, shape his future, and achieve his own authentic possibilities, then clearly the spread of literacy and education and the expansion of communications are key components of the process.

Thomas Jefferson once remarked that "Knowledge is power, knowledge is safety, knowledge is happiness." Although scholars have greatly exaggerated the connection between literacy and education, on the one hand, and economic success in capitalist society, on the other (the historian Harvey Graff calls this the great "literacy myth"), it is still true that in Western culture, the capacity to read and write can immeasurably enhance an individual's sense of effectiveness in the world. When pamphlets, books, newspapers, and magazines are readily available, individuals can participate in a larger world of politics and culture, going beyond the limits of locality to communicate with people they have never seen face to face, escaping the constraints of time to engage in dialogue with writers long dead, and putting all they learn in the service of personal goals. To Daniel

Lerner, such "media participation" nourishes "psychic mobility," a distinctively modern characteristic that goes along with economic and geographical mobility. Readers of newspapers and magazines, he says, learn to put themselves in new situations, to imagine things as different from what they already are, to welcome new knowledge and possibilities, to embrace change as a positive way of life. In the process, they become active participants in society, fully and eagerly committed to making a new — that is, Western liberal capitalist — order of things.[1]

Richard Ohmann rightly criticizes modernization theory, and Lerner's influential version of it, for mystifying the process of social and economic development. Modernization turns out to be just another name for liberal capitalism, American-style. The theory blithely passes over the intractable fact that different people, and especially different social classes, possess varying degrees of power to affect the social and economic order, and that many individuals have to adapt to choices made by other, more powerful persons. "Media participation" and the expansion of communications, Ohmann aptly observes, are not abstract, impersonal events in the movement of progress; the pioneers and promoters of mass magazines had specific goals in mind — notably, profits — and a definite part to play in the process of rationalizing, stabilizing, and legitimizing the world of modern industrial capitalism. And if the magazines actually served the needs of readers by helping them make the transition to that world, this was hardly a triumph of democracy, of public institutions responding to popular desires. Rather, it was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy: capitalist magazines adapted readers to a world the capitalists had made.

This is an effective critique, with which I am in complete agreement. But theory is one thing, history another. In concrete terms, Professor Ohmann's attempt to test Lerner's notion of media participation by investigating the creation of mass magazines is really off the mark. For while it is true that a *national* mass culture did not develop in the United States until the end of the nineteenth century, it is equally true that American mass culture — the culture of middle-class capitalism — was established well before then. Indeed, starting after the Revolution and acceleratig in the period from 1790 to 1840, a process of deep social change took place that essentially brought forth a "communications revolution." In virtually every aspect of media participation from keeping diaries and sending letters by mail to reading best-selling sentimental novels and buying cheap newspapers, the lives of ordinary people were transformed. Moreover, these changes happened in a way remarkably similar to the one Lerner has described. The communications revolution accompanied all those other great events in the saga of modernization: the advance of capitalism and the beginning of modern economic growth; the development of mass democracy; the proliferation of numerous voluntary associations; the great increase in geographical and social mobility; and the assertion of new ideals of individualism and equality of opportunity.[2]

To appreciate the significance of the communications revolution, consider the situation of the colonial New Englander, *circa* 1750. He participated in what was essentially an oral culture in the small, rural communities that dominated the landscape. He could read, to be sure, and so could most of the women he knew, but for the most part, he read only a few books over and over: the Bible, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*. When he read, he was only interested in the gospel "news" — that was the story he needed always to keep in mind. There were, in any case, only a few newspapers, and those were confined to the coastal cities. When a man with the lovely name of Silent Wilde began work as an express rider between Boston and the Connecticut Valley in the 1770s, carrying newspapers from town to town to regular customers for a charge of one dollar for six-months' service, he had to face the fact that there were few takers: at best, he could attract only about eight or ten customers in Northampton and probably no more in Deerfield. For information about events beyond town borders, people in the Connecticut Valley, like people throughout rural New England, relied mainly on oral sources, on local notables, and especially on the minister whose Sabbath sermon was something of a town gazette. If one wanted the news of the capital or wanted access to official culture, one consulted the local elite.[3]

All of this changed in the wake of the Revolution. People throughout New England and the colonies were caught in a broad process of popular mobilization which scattered them across the countryside to encounter new scenes and institutions in the course of fighting a continental war. As a consequence, people began to participate eagerly in the expanding means of communication. There is time here to detail only two dimensions of the change. First, the mails. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the cost of sending mail was high, and as the historian Richard D. Brown tells us, "most people lived their whole lives without ever sending or receiving a letter." That situation changed radically in the antebellum period, as a result of the vast expansion of the postal road system and the great cheapening of the cost of stamps. In 1800, there were only 903 post offices in the U.S.; by 1840, some 13,500; in 1860, 28,000, one for every 1,100 people

(and that includes slaves and children). Likewise, the number of newspapers proliferated at a rate well beyond the expansion of population. Not only did the number of newspapers jump from only 92 in 1790 to over 1,400 in 1840, but a great many of these newcomers shifted from weekly to semi-weekly and daily editions. So widely were these newspapers supported that in the town of Concord, Massachusetts — the place I know best — which had a population of about 1,900, the *Yeoman's Gazette* achieved a circulation of 1,100 by 1827. To be sure, the newspaper reached readers throughout Middlesex County, but even if we reduce its Concord circulation by more than half, we would still have one newspaper for every home. No wonder, then, that a writer in the *Yeoman's Gazette* heralded the Jacksonian era as "the age of Periodicals" and another dubbed his contemporaries a "reading generation." And no wonder that Henry David Thoreau could remark that "Hardly a man takes a half hour's nap after dinner, but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, 'What's the news?' as if the rest of mankind had stood his sentinels." It was Thoreau, too, who bragged that "I never received more than one or two letters in my life . . . that were worth the postage."[4]

Simply to describe this communications revolution by evoking long lines at the post-office and crowds at the newstands is, of course, not enough. Professor Ohmann rightly insists that we investigate not only who is participating in the media but more important, on whose terms. Not much research has been done on this subject. What evidence we do have suggests a vast audience for communications extending throughout the population. It is particularly important to note that women, who in the colonial era were confined to the home, where they learned about public life through their fathers and husbands, gained independent access to communications in the Jacksonian era. Indeed, elitist males scorned the emerging female audience for sentimental novels for bringing mediocrity to the once-gentlemanly world of letters.[5]

Counting numbers, however important, is less critical than assessing responsibility for the changes that took place. I would certainly agree with Ohmann that capitalist growth was initiated by a relatively narrow group of merchant-capitalists and manufacturers, whose actions reshaped the framework in which everybody else had to live. By contrast, the vast expansion of communications was a "democratizing" agent, diffusing information and decentralizing access to knowledge throughout the land.

But did any of the communications revolution actually enhance individual autonomy and feelings of effectiveness in the world? Nobody really knows, though the celebrations of the "age of Periodicals"

certainly suggest this was the case. Still, it is abstracting media excessively to speak of their effects without ever addressing their content. Let us note here briefly several features of the newspapers and media of Jacksonian America that should give us pause.

First, while the newspapers frequently ran fiction, political essays, arguments for agricultural improvement, and a host of other features that would later fill the magazines of the Gilded Age, the fact is that much of their content told of crime, violence, natural disasters, and bizarre freaks of nature (seven-hundred-pound pigs and two-headed bulls), all of which testified not to the orderliness of life but to a world well beyond human control. Such interest in the accidental and freakish in human affairs may perhaps reflect a traditional mentality, one out of step with the progressive mood of "modern" men. But the fact is that the more one consulted the newspapers, the more one might feel that the world operated on its own unpredictable course, heedless of human desires — hardly a comforting thought for anyone with a "modern personality."

Second, we ought to note that modern media may actually undermine an individual's sense of effectiveness in the very process of serving his needs. This is not simply because the news may testify to a world out of control, but also because the media may create a cult of expertise that substitutes the supposedly scientific judgment of professionals for an individual's opinion of his own condition in life. Much of the new literature of the Jacksonian era was of this sort, a literature designed to answer what Ralph Waldo Emerson once called the dominant question of the day: "How shall I live?" Experts told people how to choose spouses, how to build homes, how to raise children, how to bury the dead. Of course, the proliferation of experts and the competition between them gave people many opportunities for choice, even as it may have confused them.

But there was another genre of communications that may have exerted a more insidious effect: the sentimental novel. In *The Feminization of American Culture,* Ann Douglas has suggested that the spread of novels and novel-reading by women in the Jacksonian era may have represented the Trojan horse of modern consumer culture. Novel-reading, she says, frequently was a passive act that actually undermined people's capacity to act in the world. Novels provided a fantasy life, in which readers could indulge their hopes and whims before coming back to earth and to life in middle-class capitalist culture. In that sense, the sentimental novels and the capitalist book publishing industry which organized their mass distribution may have played an important part in getting people to accept a world of "necessity" and take part in the new structure of things.[6]

In short, the expansion of communications — part of a larger process of social change — simultaneously advanced and frustrated possibilities for individuals to assert their autonomy and shape their own society, and this became increasingly evident during the latter part of the nineteenth century, the period Ohmann covers in his piece. By then, America had crystallized into a modern middle-class culture. But the forces for national uniformity (the concentration of wealth and power in trusts) in a new national economy were clearly threatening middle-class Americans' sense of effective control over their lives. And the threat from below seemed equally ominous; the emergence of an industrial, largely immigrant working class that demanded justice in their lives. It is this double threat from above and below to middle-class people, in the context of a new national economy, that helps to explain the rise of mass magazines at the time Professor Ohmann depicts.

Here I am drawing on the work of my colleague in the Amherst American Studies Department, Theodore P. Greene. In *America's Heroes,* Greene traces the interplay between the emergence of national mass magazines at the turn of the century and the changing images of success in American culture. Greene portrays in broad strokes essentially the same process Professor Ohmann depicts: the creation of advertiser-dominated mass media that purvey the goods, the ideas, and the values that fit people into urban, industrial-capitalist society. But the steps along that misdirected path are in Greene's account remarkably different from those in Ohmann's. Greene persuasively demonstrates that the magazines pioneering the so-called magazine revolution of 1893 — *McClure's, Cosmopolitan,* and *Munsey's* — did not emerge full-blown as the handmaidens of corporate capitalism and consumer culture. Indeed, in their first years of success, these magazines were not all that different in content from their high-culture, elitist predecessors. They ran much the same kind of fiction, provided literary visits to many of the same exotic places, and carried the same sort of biographies and looks at history that had appeared in *Harper's* or *The Atlantic.* What distinguished these new mass periodicals were, first, their cheap price and, second, their enthusiastic attention to the doings of the business and political leaders of their day. The magazines were filled with numerous biographies celebrating America's Captains of Industry; you could read in *Munsey's* about "Two Miles of Millionaires" (New York's Fifth Avenue) and "The Palace Cottages of Newport." These stories anticipated the world of *People* magazine, but their purpose was not to trivialize celebrities — make them just like us, only more famous — but rather to demonstrate the heroic qualities of America's self-made men.

Greene's point is that the magazines first set out to shore up a threatened ideal of individualism in an age of concentration, to dispel the "fallacy," as *McClure's* put it, "that the individual does not count." And for two decades the magazine tried to do just that, against all the odds; when the revelations of the muckrakers showed that the Captains of Industry were often corrupt malefactors of wealth, the magazines upheld the heroic politicians and reformers who fought for good. In the end, though, the rear-guard struggle for individualism failed. By the World War I era, magazines had come under advertiser domination, had dropped their criticisms of businessmen, and had given up the effort to find Napoleonic heroes in gray-flannel suits. The day of the organization man was at hand. The successful man went along, was efficient, and adapted to the order of things.[7]

In effect, the hundreds of thousands of middle-class readers who participated in the magazine revolution of the 1890s were not seeking to adapt to the new national society of industrial capitalism, but were instead looking for reassurance that their old familiar world — a world premised on individualism — was still intact. But the magazines could neither sustain that illusion nor maintain an effective critical stance on corporate America. They promised hope for beleaguered middle-class individuals, but undermined individuals' faith in themselves.

And that is their divided legacy as instruments of modernization. Magazines today tantalize us with knowledge about new men, ideas, and places, but they end up impeding possibilities for real political changes that might strengthen individual participation in society. Popular culture discards material as fast as it absorbs it. It can make Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the bearded Russian dissenter behind stone walls in rural Vermont, the hero of one week's cover story and completely forget him the next month. There are surely moments when the imposed silence of Siberia might seem a more satisfying exile than Vermont's freedom to speak in a culture where words are purveyed mainly to create celebrities and celebrities are exploited to sell the very things the writers disdain.

Notes

[1] See Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 47–65; Richard D. Brown, *Modernization* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 3–22; Richard D. Brown, " 'Knowledge Is Power': Communications and the Structure of Political and Cultural Authority in the Early National Period, 1780–1840" (unpublished manuscript, 1978), p. 2;

Harvey J. Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Literacy and Social Structure in the Nineteenth-Century City* (New York: Academic, 1979).

[2] I am drawing here on the evidence in Brown, *Modernization*, pp. 94–121 and *passim*, and " 'Knowledge Is Power' "; William J. Gilmore, " 'The Annihilation of Time and Space': The Transformation of Event and Awareness in American Consciousness, c. 1780–1850" (unpublished manuscript, 1980); Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), pp. 12–60; David Hackett Fischer, "America: A Social History, Vol. I, The Main Lines of the Subject 1650–1975" (unpublished manuscript, 1974), ch. one.

[3] See David D. Hall, "The World of Print and Collective Mentality in Seventeenth-Century New England," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), pp. 166–80; Brown, " 'Knowledge Is Power' "; Gregory Nobles, "Politics and Society in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1740–1775: The Rural West on the Eve of the Revolution" (Diss. University of Michigan 1979), p. 219.

[4] Brown, *Modernization*, pp. 53, 166; Gilmore, " 'Annihilation of Time and Space'," pp. 37–38; Middlesex *Gazette*, July 28, 1821; *Yeoman's Gazette*, November 17, 1827; Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, ed. Owen Thomas (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 63.

[5] See Brown, " 'Knowledge Is Power' "; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750–1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), pp. 44–117; [Richard Hildreth], "The Republic of Letters," *The American Monthly Magazine*, I (1829), pp. 22–23.

[6] Stephen Whicher, ed., *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 330; Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976); Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*.

[7] See Theodore P. Greene, *America's Heroes: The Changing Models of Success in American Magazines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 104, 335–36, and *passim*.

Reply to Gross

Richard Ohmann

I want to respond to two of Robert Gross's points. Both are clarifying and helpful, but I do not believe that either one challenges the explanation I offered of the growth of mass culture.

First, Professor Gross holds that a middle-class mass culture was established in the early decades of the last century, well before the period in which I locate this development. Let me state the definition of mass culture I use: voluntary experiences that are produced (for profit) by a few, for millions across the nation to share in similar or identical form, simultaneously or nearly so, and with dependable frequency. Mass culture builds audiences organized around common

needs and interests, not residence in a particular place. This definition excludes the newspaper-reading and letter-writing Professor Gross describes. One cannot settle disputes about how history happened by imposing a definition. But I hope that readers, including Professor Gross, will agree that my definition gets at the phenomenon which is the focus of all recent debate about mass culture and its effects. The *Yeoman's Gazette* may have brought expert advice into its readers' lives, but I doubt that Herbert Marcuse would have attacked it for making them one-dimensional, or that Herbert Gans would have risen to defend it against such charges. Nor do Lerner and his confreres have such newspapers in mind when they speak of media participation and the "empathy" it produces. In any case, large cities are a precondition for them and for all the other changes that constitute modernization. I persist in thinking that the last quarter of the nineteenth century is the relevant period in U.S. history.

Second, Professor Gross cites Theodore Greene's excellent study, *America's Heroes*, as evidence that the threat to middle-class people from above and below "helps to explain the rise of mass magazines," and that these people "were not seeking to adapt to the new national society of industrial capitalism, but were instead looking for reassurance that their old familiar world — a world premised on individualism — was still intact." Insofar as middle-class anxieties explain the content that "worked" to build circulations, they do help explain the rise of these magazines. What is that content? Greene shows that in the leading magazines of the 1890s "business was the true field for the modern American hero." He quotes Munsey to this effect: "In this country of ours . . . genius asserts itself in the financier and becomes most forceful and most dramatic. The most dramatic spot on this earth today is Wall Street."[1] That middle-class readers devoured biographies and stories of farm boys who made good in business by acting out an inflexible purpose and coming to rule their environments through creativity and hard work suggests to me that Professor Gross is right to say that these readers were looking for reassurance that old principles of individualistic striving still held, but is wrong to conclude that people were not seeking to adapt to the advanced capitalist society forming around them. It seems to me very common indeed for people to find their security in "emergent" social formations by adapting "residual" values (Raymond Williams' terms). Greene's study of heroes gives support to my all-too-brief argument that these magazines offered their readers an acceptable understanding of how society works, and of how individuals might live decent and successful lives within it. Social analysis and myths of individual heroism might seem uneasy companions between the covers of a

single magazine. But the combination has worn well through the decades of monopoly capitalism, and appears just slightly altered as a staple of — what else? — the *Reader's Digest* today.

Note

[1] Theodore P. Greene, *America's Heroes; The Changing Models of Success in American Magazines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 156–7. Munsey is quoted from an article on Stephen V. White in the April, 1892 issue of his magazine. Greene chose the four "general" magazines with largest circulations for his study. If he had not followed this rather exclusive practice, only *Munsey's* would have remained in his big four, accompanied (and led) by *Comfort*, the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *Hearthstone;* and he would have found a rather different, though complementary, array of "heroes." (See vol. 3 of Mott's *History*.)

"Examination Hell": Entrance Examinations in Japan's Modernization Process

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Each year some 700,000 Japanese compete for 320,000 places by taking college entrance examinations. Almost all of these 700,000 will have attended special "cram schools" (called *juku* and *yobiko*) since age twelve, while roughly 200,000 of them will have spent at least one post-graduate year as a *"ronin,"* a word that once meant "masterless *samurai,*" but in today's parlance refers to those studying full-time in order to take the examinations again.[1] Students attempting to enter the prestigious national universities must first pass a screening examination known as the "common test" (*kyotsu tesuto*), and then take separate achievement examinations lasting up to eight hours administered by each faculty *(gakubu)* of each university to which the student wishes to apply. Private universities normally require only those tests produced by their own faculties. As the following example from the 1977 Tokyo University English examination suggests, the tests themselves are often pedantically difficult:

> Which word cannot be changed into a word ending in 'ion': decide, destroy, depend, intend or describe?[2]

Getting into college in Japan thus requires not only an intense amount of preparation for the examinations, but also a difficult series of choices about what faculties of what colleges to try for on any given examination week. Not surprisingly, this process has for some eighty years been known in the Japanese press as *shiken jigoku* or "examination hell."

Attempts to change this allegedly "undemocratic" stress on memorization were made not only by several Japanese reformers prior to World War II, but also by the American Occupation forces who attempted between 1945 and 1952 to replace the traditional examinations with a new college admissions system that included an American style "SAT" type aptitude test known as the *shingaku tekisei kensa* or *shinteki* for short.[3] Even though these efforts all failed, the Japanese still criticized the traditional system, blaming it for problems as diffuse as Japan's relative lack of Nobel prize winners, the high suicide rate for Japanese youth, or those phalanxes of ultra-Marxist radicals who are periodically shown thrashing the capitalist system of which